

SCRIPT

# The Ceylon Coup

a DCS Monologue

Part of the 'Dear Children, Sincerely ...' project



written by  
**RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA**

Based on interviews conducted through  
the DCS theatre research project

stages  
theatre  
group

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**The Ceylon Coup – a DCS Monologue**

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A Stages Theatre Group presentation

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Stages Theatre Group presentation  
First performed in,  
Colombo, Sri Lanka, January 2017,  
Panibharatha theatre, University of Visual and Performing Arts.

## **An Introduction to the *DCS Project***

### **‘Dear Children, Sincerely...’ a conversation across generations**

#### **What is the *DCS Project*?**

“**Dear Children, Sincerely... a conversation across generations**” (or the *DCS project*) is a research theatre project begun in Sri Lanka in 2015 by Stages Theatre Group. *DCS* collects the stories and experiences of the generation born in the 1930s and takes them to the present-day audiences in the form of storytelling and live performance.

Under the *DCS project*, short performance pieces are created from extensive conversations conducted with senior citizens, with each performance piece not more than 15 minutes long. These stories stand alone as individual performance pieces and can also be linked together to create longer theatrical productions.

Between 2015 and 2020, through the *DCS project*, over 70 senior citizens of Sri Lanka were interviewed and performance pieces created from these conversations.

The *DCS project* has also been implemented in Rwanda, Palestine, Pakistan, the UK, Serbia and DRC.

#### **The *DCS Monologues***

The monologues under *DCS project* (the *DCS Monologues*) are personal stories of individuals who belonged to the generation born in the 1930s. Each *DCS monologue* tells us the story of one such individual. Together they give us some historical perspective on what people consider important, what people easily forget and what they find unforgettable.

*A Tamil sportsman who left the country after securing a Gold Medal for it, an old lady displaced for the first time at the age of 90, a faithful butler who observed the infamous attempted Military Coup, a woman lawyer heading the country’s first Disappearance Commission, a doctor who trusted her family inheritance to a riotous drunk...* These are but some of the *DCS Monologues*.

*The Ceylon Coup*, though technically not a monologue, is a part of the *DCS Monologues* series.

## **An Introduction to *The Ceylon Coup***

Based on an anonymous interview in the DCS project.

### **About the Dialogue**

The 1962 attempted Coup in Sri Lanka was also called the ‘Gentlemen’s Coup’ – as it was seen as the rising up of the elite Christian English speaking class against the State – in response to the measures brought in by the ‘*Sinhala Only*’ Bill and the Bandaranaiques.

After the British left Ceylon, those left in power were very much oxford-educated, English speaking elite of Colombo. This monologue talks about the time when a young politician – SWRD Bandaranaike who, himself, belonged to this class of society, broke away from his friends and community and introduced the concept of ‘*Sinhala Only*’, a political masterstroke that brought him into power as Prime Minister, and changed the course of the country’s history irrevocably.

Excerpt from the Daily News  
Friday, December 1965

### **11 men convicted in the Ceylon Coup...**

The men found guilty in the Ceylon Supreme Court on three counts of conspiracy to wage war against the Queen...

Mr. Don John Francis Douglas Liyanage, Col. Maurice de Mel, Col de Sarem, Mr. C C. Dissnayaka, Mr. Sydney de Zoysa, Admiral Royce de Mel, Mr. Noel Mattysz, Col. Basil Jesudasan, Mr. Terrance Wijesinghe, Mr. Lionel Jirasinghe, Mr. V.E. Perera.

### **Performance History**

First performed by : Tehani Chitty and Sanjeewa Upendra –  
Panibaratha Theatre  
University of Visual and Performing Arts  
Colombo 2017

Subsequent performances : Ranmali Mirchandani and Sanjeewa Upendra –  
Colombo, Chillaw, Kuliypitiya – 2017, 2018, 2019

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website [www.stages.lk](http://www.stages.lk)

# **The Ceylon Coup**

## **Characters**

LADY                      A grand old lady of the elite class in Ceylon

WIJESOMA              Her faithful companion, driver, cook and friend.

.

*A middle aged Wijesoma leads an elegant elderly lady on to stage and seats her down in front of the audience. He then stands behind her, by her side.*

Lady: (counting on her fingers, slowly) Francis, Maurice...

Wijesoma: (interjecting gently) ... Sarem...

Lady: Sarem... C C., Sydney, Royce... Mattysz,...

Wijesoma: (interjecting gently) ... Basil,

Lady: Mattysz, Basil, Terrance...

Wijesoma: (wrapping it up) ජීර්සිංහ සහ පෙරේරා. ( Jirasinghe and Perera.)

Lady: That's right. All Christians.

Wijesoma: හමුදා පාලනයකට වැඩි කරපු ඔක්කොමල්ලා හමුදාවේ හිටපු ආගමේ ලොකු මහත්තුරු. ( All the officers involved in the Ceylon Coup were Christian.)

Lady: We all knew each other.

Wijesoma: එකම පැලැන්තියේ අය (same class no?).

Lady: We met at church...

Wijesoma: (aside) ඇත්තටම හම්බුනේ ඩිනර් පාටි වල. (actually they mostly met at dinner parties...).

Lady: We were all good friends.

Wijesoma: (aside) බොහෝ දුරට ...(most of the time...)

Lady: It was a period of great fun. Lots of laughter and no one really took anything very seriously.

Wijesoma: එකනම් ඇත්ත තමයි .මැඩම්ලගේ පන්තියේ කච්චිය වැඩිත් බොනවා .. හිනාවෙනවා ...හමුදා පාලනයට යන්න කරපු කුමන්ත්රණය ගැනවත් කිසිම බයක් තිබුනේ නෑ. (pause) මම නම් හොදටම බය වෙලා හිටියේ. (That's true. Madam's people always laugh at everything. Even the coup ... not afraid to do it. I, of course, was terrified).

Lady: *Such adventure* around the coup. 'Waging war against the Queen!' Delightful!! Everyone found their own way of supporting it.



- Lady: (to Wijesoma) Remember Mr. Jayasuriya?
- Wijesoma: ඔව් මැඩමි (Yes madam.)
- Lady: Mr. Jayasuriya worked at SLBC...
- Wijesoma: එදා එ මහත්තය මොකක්දෝ ක්‍රිස්තියානි ආගම ගැන කියන සින්දුවක් ගැනුවානේ ගුවන් විදුලියේ. (on the day of the coup that gentleman played some Christian song on SLBC... )
- Lady: He played 'Onward Christian Soldiers' Wijesoma. *On air*, on the day of the coup. (pause) Poor wretched fellow got sacked.
- Wijesoma: මෝඩ කමනේ ඉනිත්. (Stupid fellow)
- Lady: None of us were happy with the changes in the country.
- Wijesoma: රටනම් නරකම තැනට තමයි වෙනස් උනේ .ආණ්ඩුව රටේ හැමදෙයක්ම ගන්න පටන් ගන්නනේ (The changes in the country were bad. The government was taking over everything).
- Lady: *Such a mess!!* Ask Wijesoma! Every morning we'd wake up not knowing what else had been taken over by the govt. The Bandaranaike's ... (shudders)
- Wijesoma: (cutting in) දෙන්නම! ...ඛණ්ඩාරනායක මහත්තයට වඩා සිරිමාවෝ මැඩමි තමයි.... ( both of them – but her more than him)...
- Lady: *Both* Bandaranaike's' changed the culture of politics in Sri Lanka. Look at the mess in the estates!
- Tell them Wijesoma, I get a headache just thinking about it.
- Wijesoma: (pleased) හරි .හරි මැඩමි .....දැන් .....පොල් වත්තක උනත් හරියටම ප්රමාණයක් තියෙන එපැයි...(Yes, madam. Now... Estates need to be of a certain size).
- Lady: (cutting in) See? Even Wijesoma knows... All the coconut estates were between 300... (she stops short, realizing she has interrupted Wijesoma) ... Sorry Wijesoma...
- Wijesoma: හොදට වගා කරන්නනම් පොල් වත්තක් අක්කර300 ක්500 ක් විතර ලොකු වෙන්න ඕන .ආණ්ඩුව තීරණය කරලා කියපි ඒවා50 හෙ50 හෙ කැලි වලට කඩලා සාමාන්ය මිනිස්සුන්ට දෙන්න කියලා.(Between 300 to 500 acres. But with the estate takeover they were reduced to 50 acres)
- Lady: *Disastrous!!*

Wijesoma: එනනින් නමයි පොල් කර්මාන්තෙ විනාසේ පටන් ගන්නේ (Disastrous for the industry.)

Lady: Because, of course, these estates kept being divided up into smaller and smaller bits – every time a laborer on his deathbed cut up the land he owned and divided it amongst his *eight* children...

Wijesoma: එක ඇස පනාපිටම උනානේ .මය විදිහට කඩලා දුන්න50 හේ කැල්ල. දරුවෝ5 ක් හිටියොත්, කාලයක් යද්දී ඒ දරුවන්ට 5 ට බෙදලා දෙනවා. එයාලා එයාලගේ දරුවන්ට දෙනවා ..එයාල එයාලගේ ඊලග පරම්පරාවට ...ඒවගේ වෙලා දැන් පෙන්නේ නැද්ද පර්චස්10 යෙ කැල්ලට එක පොල් ගහක් වෙන නැතටම ආවනේ. ( I saw this with my own eyes. These pieces of 50-acre land, if someone had 5 children, was divided into 5 smaller pieces. They cut it up for their children. They give it to the next generation. Went on like that and now look – it’s one coconut tree to a ten perch land...)

Lady: You can’t do coconut industry like that.

Wijesoma: අම්මපා මැඩිමි. ( I know this madam).

Lady: Thank you Wijesoma.

*Pause.*

Then the schools. Overnight change from English to Sinhala. Overnight. I told my children – sorry my darlings you are on your own – I’ll be damned if I am going to learn how to say ‘*Holy Ghost*’ in Sinhala. There, I draw the line.

Oh it was a time of such short-sightedness...

Wijesoma: හැබැයි මැඩිමි අපේ රටේම තවත් කොටසක් හිටියානේ මේ වේනස්කම් ඕනා කියලා කියාපු කරපු. (But then Madam, there was also a section in society that felt that these changes were necessary...)

Lady: And they were not wrong Wijesoma. මං ඉස්සෙල්ල කියල නියනවනේ. They had been left out of the corridors of power for so long. The masses...

Wijesoma: මැඩිමිට මනකද පාර්ලිමේන්තුව අපි වගේ සාමාන්ය කට්ටියට යන්න නිදහස් කරපු දවස ...(You remember madam when they opened up the parliament to the average working class person...)

Lady: Of course! *Such* crowds outside the parliament. They opened the doors and there was this *huge* surge...

Wijesoma: අප්පා .බලන එපැ ...අපේ එවුන් ඉතින්... ඇතුලට යන්න පොරකාපු හැටියක් .(People were pushing to get in...)

- Lady: People wanting to *see to touch*.
- Wijesoma: සුවු අනගානවා .ඉබිනවා. (*shudders*)
- Lady: There was a *palpable* sense of entitlement. Of ownership over those coveted places of power where all the decisions of the country were taken – by people in *suits*, speaking *English*...
- SWRD saw this...
- Wijesoma: (*aside*) මැඩමිලාගේ හොදම යාලුවෙක්. (Used to be a good friend of Madam's)
- Lady: ...And he just swooped in...
- Wijesoma: නිතරම ඩිනර් පාටි වලට ආවා. (Came to all our dinner parties)
- Lady: He had turned his back on his social circles before you could say jack flash!
- Wijesoma: පාටි වලට සුදු සරම අදින්න පටන්ගන්නේ. (He started wearing sarongs to the parties, no)
- Lady: He was English speaking, Oxford Educated, he was Christian. I mean – Solomon, West, Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike no?
- Wijesoma: (*helpfully explaining*) S.W.R.D...
- Lady: Wijesoma! Can you get more Christian than that? මිට වඩා ක්‍රිස්තියන් විය හැකිද විජේසෝම...
- But he converted. He was so smart...
- Wijesoma: බණ්ඩාරනායක මහත්තයා නම් ඉතින් වෙලාවට මොලේ පාවිච්චි කරා. ( Yes, Mr. Bandaranaike was very smart).
- Lady: ... Ahead of all of us.
- Wijesoma: ඇයි මතකද මැඩමි ...අර අල්විස් මැඩමි දවසක් මුනටම ඇහුවනේ ඇයි සිංහල Only එක ගැන ඇහුව. ( Do you remember madam, once at a party Madam de Alwis asked SWRD what made him say "Sinhala Only".)
- Lady: Of course I remember. He replied "*Madam, if I had to say "Arabic Only "to get into parliament I would have."*
- Wijesoma: ඔව් ...මමත් අහගෙන... (yes, even I heard him)
- Lady: Oh my... didn't those dinner parties become charged over night?

Now what were we talking about?

Wijesoma ponders.

Lady: Ah! The coup... sorry... so sorry...now...the night before the coup, who came to dinner?

Wijesoma: බාකර් මහත්තයා .( Mr. Barker)

Lady: Of course, I was at a dinner with the head of the army, Barker. We had finished our wine and dinner and had started on Wijesoma's pudding. He received a call from Temple Trees.

Wijesoma: අරලිය ගහ මනිදිරෙන් අපු call එකට මමයි මේ පැත්තෙන් මුලින්ම කථා කරේ. (I am the one who answered the call. I got so afraid.)

Lady: They wanted him to go and arrest the officers who planned the coup.

Wijesoma: එතකොට තමයි මැඩම් නුත් දැනගන්නේ කුමන්ත්රණය අසාර්ථකයි කියලා. (That's when Madam got to know that they coup had failed.)

Lady: Barker left immediately but he was in no hurry. He told me he would be back soon. And he told me to keep his pudding for him.

Wijesoma: මම හදපු පුඩින්... (We knew how to make our puddings...)

Lady: Ultimately they all got arrested Derrick, Joyce, Jeff, Tony.

Wijesoma: අර ආගමේ මහත්තුරු ඔක්කොමලා වැලිකඩනේ දැමීමේ... (Those gentlemen Christians...all put into prison.)

Lady: All of them put in Welikada. Allowed just one visit a week. Had to eat prison food. But Colombo society didn't let them down.

Wijesoma: මැඩම් ලා එයාලත් එක්ක දිගටම හිටියා (Madam's community stuck together.)

Lady: We'd smuggle in books and food.

Wijesoma: මම මැඩම්ව තනියම නම් කවදාවත් වැලිකඩට යවීමේ නෑ. ( I never let her go alone.)

Lady: It was all quite grand. I learnt how to bundle three books together to look like one.

Wijesoma: උගත් මිනිස්සුනේ ... පොත්මයි ගනිවීමේ. ( All educated people, so they only took books.)

Lady: (aside) On Vesak we smuggled in ham, chicken and pork.

Wijesoma: ... (pretends not to hear or understand)

Pause

Lady: Oh those were interesting times... What convolutions around religion and language and class...

Wijesoma: එකම ආගම උනත් එදා ආගමයි අද ආගමයි වෙනස්. (religion then was not religion now.)

Lady: There was that issue about the execution of the monk who assassinated SWRD. He was in jail for a while – and sentenced to death. But the government were in a real twist because they didn't want to execute a Buddhist monk.

Wijesoma: එදා ආණ්ඩුව උනත් ලොකු පැටලිලිලක හිටියනේ භාමුදුරු කෙනෙකුට දඬුවම් දෙන්නේ කොහොමද කියලා. ( Even that government went into a real tangle. How do you punish a monk?)

Lady: So what did they do? They called in Fr. Mathew Peiris, and got him to convert the monk into Christianity.

Then they killed him.

Wijesoma: ආදර් පිරිස්ව ගේන්න ගන්නා ...භාමුදුරුවන්ව කනෝලික කරා . එල්ලලා මරුවා ( Fr. Peries was brought in. the monk was made Christian. Then they hung him.)

Lady: The monk. Not Fr. Peiris.  
Aiyo Wijesoma!  
SWRD... born a Christian, converting to Buddhism to become Prime Minister ... killed by a Buddhist monk who then is converted into Christianity to be executed.

Wijesoma: උපනින් කිරිස්නියානි ...අගමැති වෙන්න බෞද්ධ උනා...භාමුදුරු කෙනෙක් වැඩි නියලා මරුවා.... භාමුදුරුවෝ කනෝලික කරලා... එල්ලලා මරුවා..

Lady: You *had* to have a sense of humor to have survived all this. Why are young people so *serious* now days? No one laughs any more. Everyone is *so* serious.

Wijesoma: භාමුදුරුගේ අළුවත් රවේ නියාගන්නේ නෑ නේ ....මැඩම්...( They didn't even want his ashes here no?)

Lady: My goodness now. Sirimavo didn't want that monk's ashes anywhere in Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

Wijesoma: ජලේන් එකේ ගිහින් මහා මුහුද මැද දැමීමේ... (took it out in a plane to the middle of the sea...)

Lady: My poor friend Barker – of the unfinished pudding – was instructed to fly a plane out of our territorial waters and strew the ashes in the ocean. Barker took Fr. Mathew Peiris with him. And I believe they performed the full final Christian funeral rites for that criminal ex monk, right up there in the sky.

Wijesoma: මම නම් මේ දේවල් වැඩිය විස්වාස කරන්නේ නෑ.  
එත් ඒ අළු කොයි පැත්තට ගියාද දන්නේ නෑ ,නේ?  
(I'm not the superstitious type. But I wonder which way those ashes blew.)

*Wijesoma helps the lady up from her chair and off the stage.*

**END**

## **Production Credits**

*The Ceylon Coup* was first performed at the **Panibharatha Theatre, University of the Visual and Performing Arts in Colombo**, Sri Lanka in January 2017, with the following cast and crew.

### **CAST**

Tehani Chitty and Sanjeewa Uendra (2017)

Ranmali Mirchandani and Sanjeewa Uendra (2019)

### **DESIGN TEAM**

<b>Director</b>	Tracy Holsinger Ruwanthie de Chickera
<b>Designer</b>	Tracy Holsinger Jayampathi Guruge
<b>Composer/ Sound Design</b>	Ranil Goonawardene

### **PRODUCTION TEAM**

<b>Stage Manager</b>	Akalanka Prabhashwara
<b>Backstage</b>	Prabhath Chinthaka Praveen Tilakaratne
<b>Lights</b>	Jayampathi Guruge Saman Malalasekera (2016)
<b>Sounds</b>	Pemanthi Fernando
<b>Make-up</b>	Nilmini Buwaneka (2016) Sanjeewa Uendra (2016) Jayampathi Guruge (2017)
<b>Front of House</b>	Sanda Wijeratne
<b>Production Team</b>	Nilmini Buwaneka (2017) Malshani Delgahapitiya – 2016 Anila Sadasivan Krishnamma – 2016

<b>Admin Team</b>	Miranga Ariyaratne Pemanthi Fernando Sanda Wijeratne
<b>Sponsors</b>	Gehan Gunatilleke Radhika Hettiarachchi Rebecca Owen Sanda Wijeratne
<b>Publicity/Media Team</b>	Gihan de Chickera Deandra Bulner Pemanthi Fernando Pia Hatch
<b>Graphic Design</b>	Venura Navod Balasooriya (2016) Ruvini de Silva (2016) Deshan Tennekoon (2020)
<b>Souvenir Team</b>	Ruwanthie de Chickera Dharini Priscilla Pemanthi Fernando Piumi Wijesundara Praveen Tilakaratne Venura Navod Balasooriya
<b>Photography</b>	Prauda Buwaneka Pramila Samarakoon
<b>Video</b>	Prauda Buwaneka
<b>Video Editor</b>	Jithendra Vidyapathi
<b>Producer</b>	Radhika Hettiarachchi (2016) Pemanthi Fernando (2017) Dharini Priscilla (2017)

For more detailed insights on this play, including the back story about how it was made, an analysis of all its design elements, its production video, soundtrack, publicity campaign, all press reviews and audience comments, and more, please visit its production page on the Stages Theatre Group website [www.stages.lk](http://www.stages.lk)



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